"LEST LIFE'S RADIANCE BE LOST"
A CHRISTMAS SERMON

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PRAYER

Father of us all, at this hour, when the solitary are set in families, and wanderers and exiles think longingly of home, we think of thee, the home of us all, of the hearth fire of thy love where all are welcome. May the solemn associations of this hour be blessed to all this day.

Let our souls be quiet homes of prayer and praise where Thou mayst find fit company, where the needful cares of life are wisely ordered and put away, and wide, sweet spaces kept for Thee, where holy thoughts pass up and down, and fervent longings watch and wait.

And now, like men of old, we have come to search for simplicity, for freedom and for truth. Let our knowledge and our years drop from us that the thoughts and ways which keep our hearts unaged may claim us as their own.

We thank thee that in the fullness of time thou didst gather thy light into a life, so that even simple folk could see. We bless thee for the dawning of the light in far-off ages as soon as human eyes could bear its rays. We remember those who bore aloft the torch of truth when all was false and full of shame; those far-sighted souls who from the mountain tops of vision

heralded the coming day; those who labored in the darkened valleys to lift men's eyes to the hills.

Chiefliest of all do we bless thee for that noble son who in days of great darkness went before men. We thank thee for his words, so lustrous with truth, for his life, fragrant all through with piety and benevolence; for the triumphs which attend his name, smoothing the pathway of toil, softening the pillow of distress, and brightening the way whereon truth comes down to us and life to thee goes ever ascending up. We thank thee for the blessings which this great noble soul has widely scattered throughout the world, and most of all for this that his spark of fire has revealed to us thine own divinity enlivening this mortal human frame of ours, and prophesying such noble future of achievement.

May we remember that this life of ours has been divinely lived, that this robe of flesh and strange infirmity has been thy garment. When we grow proud of our petty knowledge, and can no longer stoop to learn thy ways, send us a child again, a new generation springing from the uncorrupted source of things, and lead us back to a sane mind, a sincere heart, and a simple life. Amen.

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We are in the most cheerful part of a church year which on the whole is not very cheerful. Those who study the religions of the world call the Protestant branch, from which most of us have come, one of the most pessimistic of all religions. At times it has been almost notorious for its dark and even fatalistic way of looking at things. It has been said by some that it is not a good religion for primitive people nor for children, both of whom incline to a more cheerful view. We like to make the most of this part of the church year to help remedy this as far as we may. Life needs as much holly as we can twine in with the cypress.

We are much interested in the implications of the part of Christian theology connected with this season. These doctrines bear witness to youthful divinity and divine youth. As the church would have it, before it was through with its thought of Him, that he is God complete, the part of his life that falls for celebration at this season is that part which celebrates God when he was new and young. This is quite the best witness, it seems to us, that Christianity has ever borne to the nature of reality and the nature of God, that beings partaking of the divine nature, potentially God and man

at once, humanly divine and divinely human, can come through the gates of human birth. Our only heresy is that this is too good an idea, and too noble a doctrine, to be confined to one age or birth. We lift it up and spread it out more widely to embrace the sons and daughters of men, this noble doctrine that the divine being of this world can come into our life immaculately; that divinity can be new as the morning as well as old as the most ancient of days, and beings such as we, particular sons of God. This is the only liberty that we have taken with these implications of deity present and revealed as this Christmas story says.

Bishop Gore in our time has told what to him is the hardest fact to get around, so that he can believe that the God of this world is good. The hardest fact in this universe for him to get around, so that he can think God is love, is the usually undeserved, and the always not understood, pain of animals. On the other side, as he looks at the world, the best witness of God's goodness and love is the children, especially little ones before they begin to harden into the conventions of men. We recall an earlier teacher of religion, confronted by the cynical and the skeptical inquiring the nature of the Kingdom, who gave like testimony, set a child in the midst as best illustrative of the nature of the Kingdom, and it is not recorded here that any doubted.

When one runs the records of religious experience, and the most convenient place now to get this record is

in Professor James' "Varieties of Religious Experience," he is struck with the extravagant, almost unearthly, feelings of happiness that came in some stage of that religious experience, and continued at this height for some time. The outstanding cases are Paul, St. Augustine, St. Francis, Wesley, but many others had like experience, just ordinary folks. We do not know whether we of this faith of ours can have that high mood of extravagant gladness and jubilancy which is testified to over and over again. More than once the fulness of joy and ecstasy is so great that they can stand no more, and pray God that if he has more for them to withhold a little for they are full. But they paid a price for it. This radiant mood in all of them came just after another mood. In every case of such unutterable gladness, the witness testifies that he had been in the depths. If there is no gladness like this of the religious experience, there is no despair so black and so unrelieved as that which they had just before this unutterable gladness came. Literally theirs was the torture of the damned. Their thought gave them a world of fact in which this state could be, and their feelings and their conscience told them they were in it. If in the new faith we do not come into such extravagant gladness as those of the old faith, it is because we have not the conditions in the new faith for being as miserable as they. They were glad because they were saved from terrible things and we have not those terrible

things to be saved from. If we have denied ourselves the chance for this radiance that was theirs, we have saved ourselves the misery over against which this gladness was set and received its vividness. If this is to be radiant Christians, we have made our choice. We will not be radiant Christians on such terms.

There is considerable evidence today of world weariness, and world weariness beginning very early in life, too early entirely. Things never work out quite as it seems they should. It would seem that a world in which God was very much of a terror, and salvation very much of a gamble, and perdition very much of a certainty, would be a world which would produce world weariness. It would seem that a world in which people had to live in cold homes and fell the trees for their clearings, and endure physical hardship and get few comforts and little ease, would be just the condition that would produce world weariness. But it did not work out this way. World weariness was perhaps at the minimum with them. They were too hard put and too busy to get to it. World weariness, lost radiance, requires certain conditions of life and thought to produce it, which they did not have. Now, through the efforts of their hard living, we have what they were working for. God now is beneficent; our human state does not give us such worry theologically; perdition has been about reduced to a subject of jest. We are not pioneering and there is little hardship and few dangers. Most

for which martyrs bled and pioneers drudged, has come. The visions of the prophets and the labors of the generations are here, fulfilled in our time and we are living in it, a world in which it would seem that world weariness could not be, and radiance of life must be. But the paradox of it, and the paradox of life, is that beyond a doubt we are more world weary than they, and world weary at an earlier age. That is, we have radiancy when theology was harsh and life hard, and world weariness when theology is kindly and life comparatively easy.

It would seem that it takes certain freedom from being driven; takes certain leisure from pressing duties and the pressing urgency of life to get housed and clothed and fed and one's soul saved, to develop a philosophy of world weariness in. World weariness seems to come just where one would think it could not come, and it does not seem to come just where one would think it would have to come. The groups who get tired of life and lose the radiancy of it are likely to be just those who are best conditioned to live life to the full. Where life is most worth living, often it is not, and where it would seem not worth living, it is. This is the paradox of human life and the paradox of better social conditions. It may well be that the chief thing with which we have to reckon in a bettering world is a state of mind and not a state of body at all. Judged by the conditions where we find it, we may know that

it is not pain, or hunger, or poverty, or financial embarrassment. It is not the pressure of a state of physical facts on the body, but it is the pressure of a philosophy of life on the mind. It has to be reached where it is, and helped by its own kind, that is, another state of mind.

There is a way of looking at life that is just the opposite of the radiant one. One arrives at it by opening his eyes to all the hard and dark things and closing them to all the brighter things. Some of the philosophies have brought all the mean and dark things together, and it has the peculiar fascination of all weird and horrid things. One will get this more or less at some time in his life and without any ill results. Dr. Crothers has observed in his last essay that it is unfortunate that our courses in philosophy are placed about twenty years before we get any philosophical interests, and he might have said about twenty years before we are quite equal to the merits of the best or the dangers of the worst philosophies. After one soaks his mind in, and lives in, a radiant view of things for a number of years, he has some resistance to hard and dark philosophies. One takes it in a little here and there, as he goes along, and he gets more or less immune to it. It never gets him down on his back mentally. If one gets an exposure to the germs of a dark philosophy before he has fortified his mental constitution with a radiant one, it is likely to work havoc. The evidence is that many are getting

for their first view of life the dark one that comes from the disillusioned later years of a few wounded souls and some grey haired philosophers. They get an interpretation of life without radiance before they get one with radiance, and there is no resistance. All the arguments that life is not worth living are massed and take the fort before the arguments that life is worth living get their defense in position.

That is, getting a philosophy of life prematurely is just a part of shutting out one part of life altogether and getting into life prematurely. The youth of life is naturally radiant and it is one's right to get this part without short measures. On one side we try to hide the evidence that we are young and on the other we are trying to hide the evidence that we are old. This would seem to say that there is only one point of life worth being in and only one age which we can confess unashamed. All we are concerned with here is the lost radiance of life when, if ever, it ought to be radiant. It would seem that the youthful radiant is the part that ought to be slowed down in passing; held on to and pulled up just as far into the years as it can be. It would seem by our practice that we have found life at its best, and only worth, in the middle of it, and that we are trying to pull both sides and ends of life into that middle. We are living at a time, notably so, when we are trying to age youth and to "youth" age, if we may invent a corresponding verb. People must get

so old just as fast as they can, but, when this ageing process goes so far, its progress must be arrested. A contemporary illustration pictures one side pulling the hands of the clock on, and the other side pulling against them, pulling the hands back.

The thing that strikes us most forcibly in this premature reaction on life, without radiance, is that it is very hard, and the hardening process of thought is an ageing process of thought. We suspect that we are getting the first fruits of rationalizing childhood, which is not rational unless it is robbed of its heritage. Presumably the great God had some reason for putting life through a long preliminary stage before rational beings were born to make themselves miserable by philosophizing about their condition. And presumably there is some deep and long tried method in putting each life through a long period of infancy and youth before life becomes a problem and reason a guide. This is our distinction as beings that are we are young, irresponsible and irrational, and live by our impulses longer than other beings on this planet. And living so is about as undisturbed by problems and the dark philosophy of things as a litter of puppies or a flock of rollicking lambs. The longest youth goes with the highest civilization and is thought to be one of the chief factors in making that civilization.

Is it not quite possible that we have considerably overdone making life reasonable, and serviceable and

seriously effective? We come upon this observation, that the most unreasonable view of life now is that which would make it all reasonable. Viewing life as a whole, living by reason alone, we are now discovering, is to live it most unreasonably, because partially. The new psychologists tell us that we are made to live by reason over about one-tenth of our affairs and over the other nine-tenths we live by something else. That is, the great plan, it may be, knew what it was doing when it made us this way. The method of life, thus far, for the developing race and the developing individual, is to have a good long period when life is lived naturally, and that is to say eagerly, instinctively, impulsively, physically and exuberantly glad to be alive. The plan of life, thus far, has been to have a part of life played as a game before it is solved as a problem, and it ought to be a glad game for a considerable time before it is a scientific or a philosophical nut to crack.

Life looked at radiantly is life looked at poetically, which is akin to being looked at magically. There are those now who look at intellectualized infancy and rationalized youth as desirable goals. Some venture that not much longer now are we to waste time getting started and we are going to plunge in full armored at a much earlier age. We note in a current magazine that poetry is to go. "In whatever degree poetry is cultivated, it must be at the expense of some branch of useful study." "Poetry," we are now informed, "was

the mental rattle of the infancy of the race, but for us now, it is the cry for the jingle of silver bells." This will indicate the emphasis of which we are speaking, of the desirability of not having any mental youth at all. We have to be young and small at first in body because we cannot start full grown, nature having fixed this, and we have found no way to change it. But mentally, it seems, we are going to dispense with infancy and youth altogether.

We are considering the possibility, at least, that pushing the middle of life back on the first part to shorten it, or to replace it, may prove disastrous, as our schemes for improving on nature frequently are. Something flies back in our face that we were not expecting. To bring the full weight of life's physical strain and burden on a body that has not built up a resistance for a long time by living life radiantly and playfully, is serious enough to engage national attention. That makes all the argument against child labor, and it is enough. To bring the full weight of life's problems, its dark facts and its hard and cynical philosophies, to bear on minds that have not thought radiantly and playfully through a considerable period, is no doubt equally disastrous. Now that we have about ended forced and premature labor for children, we may be ready for another movement to prevent forced and premature thinking for them. To bring the body early to the yoke is barbarism. Is bringing the mind early to the

yoke of life's intellectual load, is that barbarism too? We are only asking it. Honestly, has adult life, or age, solved the riddle of the universe or the ills of human society, so completely and so satisfactorily that either of these periods of life can say to the first part, "Shorten your youth, and hasten up with us?"

Now, in a church and in a sermon we should expect the radiancy of life to be linked in with religion in some way, and that we mean to do, not because it is in church or because it is a sermon. We are going to link it up only because we believe it to be a fact. We have said that we cannot hope to get that sudden radiancy that came to those who were all lost and were suddenly all saved. We are sorry if we have missed anything, but we are not going to have that sudden glory in our religious experience that they had. But, though it is a quieter glory that we get, it is with us still connected with religion, as theirs was.

We doubt if a radiant view of life can be had looking at the world or a single life just in themselves. We doubt if a radiant view of life can be had looking at life scientifically or in a humanitarian way alone, for, both of these view the world and life in themselves and at short range.

Life to be looked at radiantly has to have a foreground of mind, that things, however they may be just now, are in the large and the end, all right. Our single life has to be viewed as a part of something larger, with space and time and plan to work things out in un-

til they are right. This we may carry unconsciously or subconsciously through our works and days, but, this radiancy strikes its roots, no doubt, in this subconscious cheer. This physical world, by itself, is a hard thing to solve. Life often is a hard thing to live and always hard to explain, and only a stoically inclined genius can be radiant about it. But if there is a feeling, or a conviction, that the world at its worst and life at its hardest are on their way, and things will work out to some great consummation, that is the part of the mind which feeds the well springs of the radiant outlook.

Now religion may be wrong, but, at least it is distinctive in its error. There is nothing else of which we ourselves know that does touch up the foreground and even look longingly and hopefully over life's farthest horizon rim and hazard the cry that victory will be there. Religion is all that makes the world and our single lives parts of something larger that will work out, however long and hard the way to that desired end. We suspect that the connection between the lost radiance of life and the loss of religion is quite close, close enough to engage our attention.

We are not sure that the Christmas season can show itself useful. We rather hope that it cannot. We are not sure that it can give a good scientific or philosophical account of its moods or its doings, and, for ourselves, we do not care whether it can or not. If it is enjoyable, that is all we ask of it. If it can stay a little the hardening and the ageing process and touch up the church year with a little glory, that is enough to ask of it. This happens to be what life is a little short in just now, the supply of radiance being not quite equal to the need of it.